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SUBJECT: VATICAN REJECTS PACIFISM, BUT DEBATE SIMMERS

Summary

1. (U) Contrary to the popular perception of a pacifist Vatican generated by the Holy See's opposition to the Iraq war, senior Vatican officials have consistently acknowledged the legitimacy of war as a last resort and have recently gone out of their way to make clear that the Holy See is not pacifist. The Holy See's Permanent Observer at the UN in Geneva cited the obligation to disarm the aggressor when the human rights of citizens are under threat. Likewise, speaking at a Catholic Social week in Camaguey, Cuba, Bishop Giampaolo Crepaldi of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace warned against the excesses of pacifism. Crepaldi's comments reinforced private reassurances the Embassy has received from senior officials that the Vatican continues to adhere to its traditional doctrine on war and peace issues: that war is a regrettable but sometimes necessary aspect of human existence. There is no doubt that the Holy See and the Pope himself oppose war. But the Vatican's well-known preference for peace can make its voice all the more important when it does conclude that military action is justified. End summary.

Rejecting Pacifism

2. (U) Affirming the realism reflected in many Papal statements and official Church doctrine, the Vatican's Secretary for the Council of Justice and Peace restated the

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Holy See's rejection of pacifism as a utopian response to war and violence. Speaking at a Catholic Social week in Camaguey, Cuba, Bishop Giampaolo Crepaldi said that pacifism, while generally a positive good, runs the risk of overstatement. Crepaldi, the number two in the Council, implied that a total rejection of all forms of violence would be neither helpful nor realistic in today's world. He pointed out that Pope John Paul II could never be called a pacifist. As proof, he noted the Pope's call for humanitarian intervention during the Balkan wars, his consistent appreciation of the sacrifice and valor of those killed in defense of their homelands, and the fact that he has never condemned wars "in a single sense."

3. (U) The Holy See's Permanent Observer to the UN in Geneva, Archbishop Silvano Tomasi, delivered a similar message recently, citing Pope John Paul's Message for the 2000 World Day of Peace. In this message the Pope addressed the issue of "humanitarian intervention," observing: "Clearly, when a civilian population risks being overcome by the attacks of an unjust aggressor and political efforts and non-violent defense prove to be of no avail, it is legitimate and even obligatory to take concrete measures to disarm the aggressor. These measures however must be limited in time and precise in their aims. They must be carried out in full respect for international law, guaranteed by an authority that is internationally recognized and, in any event, never left to the outcome of armed intervention alone."

Pope John Paul II: No Pacifist

4. (SBU) The comments by Tomasi and Crepaldi come at a time when some in the Church have sought to advance the view that war in today's world can no longer be considered just. Such a view, however, goes well beyond the Pope's thinking, and it is likely that Crepaldi's comments, which would have been cleared internally, were aimed at setting the record straight. Certainly, the Pope rejects war as a tool of international policymaking. On December 16, in fact, in an address to new ambassadors, he lamented the continuing presence of the "scourge of war" and reiterated his appeal "to all men and women of good will to definitively lay down arms and to commit themselves to...dialogue." The Pope emphasized that "violence never serves the cause of peoples, nor their development." However, both he and the

Holy See's traditional just war doctrine have consistently recognized that when faced with violence, civilized peoples sometimes have no choice but to face the last resort of responding in kind. In the period immediately preceding the 2003 military action against Saddam Hussein's Iraq, the Vatican's Secretary of State, Cardinal Angelo Sodano, as well as official papal spokesman Joaquin Navarro Valls, were at pains to stress that Pope John Paul II and the Holy See were not pacifists, but rather peacemakers.

15. (SBU) More recently, the Pope has affirmed that states have the obligation to defend themselves against terrorism.

In his Message for the 2004 World Day of Peace he spoke of "the necessary fight against terrorism" and acknowledged the potential necessity of the use of force for "repressive and punitive operations." Similarly, the Pontiff's calls to "disarm the aggressor" at the time of the conflicts in Bosnia, Kosovo, and later in East Timor hardly reflect the sentiments of a pacifist. The position of the Catholic Church documented officially in its catechism is clear, regarding war as a regrettable but sometimes necessary aspect of human existence. Catholic doctrine upholds the right to self-defense for individuals and nations. Citizens are required to participate in the defense of their nation in wartime. Members of the military are described as "servants of security and freedom of nations."

Prelates Pushing Anti-War Views

16. (U) Ironically, Crepaldi's comments will be seen by many as at cross-purposes with the views of his boss, Justice and Peace Council President, Cardinal Renato Martino, who recently asserted that war constituted a modern evil "infinitely greater than the eventual goods" it can procure for the victors. Martino, who tends to offer his personal views in his frequent contacts with the media, added that war had become ever more absurd and intolerable because of the increased destructive power of weapons. He also condemned what he termed the human and economic costs of war. Martino said it was a fundamental ethical imperative to put an end once and for all to war, which he described as "pre-human."

Battle Over Pacifism Not over

7.(SBU) Although the Pope's view is clear to members of the Curia, this will not likely put an end to debate within the Holy see about the proper role of warfare in the modern world. Members of the Vatican hierarchy do not hesitate to speak their minds on political issues -- as opposed to theological issues where the Pope's word is law. As a result, the public perception of the Holy See's position on war and peace is likely to remain clouded by ongoing freelancing by senior Vatican officials. Such freelancing is tantamount to U.S. Cabinet officers giving their independent opinions on U.S. policy issues, and will continue to feed the media's penchant for emphasizing statements by cardinals or other Curia members at variance with traditional doctrines. Thus, even as the Pope reaffirms his rejection of pacifism, contrary views will continue to be publicly aired.

Comment

8.(U) The Pope's opposition to the war in Iraq left a widespread impression of a Vatican opposed to war at all costs, even though the Pope's opposition at the time carried careful caveats and ultimately recognized the right of legitimately-elected governments to make prudential judgments about war. Church leaders with more absolute anti-war views have sought to take advantage of the Pope's opposition to the Iraq war to build support for a shift in the Church's doctrine toward a complete condemnation of all war. While this struggle will continue, the Holy See's practice on war and peace issues will more likely reflect the realism -- rooted in centuries of diplomatic activism on the world stage -- that led it to approve of the U.S. action in Afghanistan and to calls for humanitarian intervention to ward off greater loss of life in Timor and Kosovo. Likewise, the Vatican's abhorrence of religiously-inspired terrorism -- violence the Pope has described as "an act of blasphemy and a perversion of religion" -- will spur it to remain a strong partner in the war on terror. In fact, its well-known preference for peace makes its voice all the more important when it does conclude that military action, whether against terror or to resolve a humanitarian catastrophe, is justified.

Nicholson

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